



## Communist University Introductions

*These texts may be used as “openings to discussion” of the original reading texts that are supplied by the CU. They are not intended to be authoritative or conclusive. They are contributions to discussion like any other such contributions. The introductions are not a substitute for the reading texts.*

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### The Classics, Part 8



The Russian Revolution of 1905

## Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution

The Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) held its founding Congress in **1898** in Minsk, Russia (all nine delegates were arrested). At that time, and in the early 1900s, no clear distinction was made between “communists” and “social democrats”. Yet the underlying division was already there, as we will see from the

Lenin's **1905** book, "[Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution](#)" (download of extensive compilation linked below).

In **1899** the prominent German Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein wrote "Evolutionary Socialism". Both Rosa Luxemburg (in "Reform or Revolution?", **1900**) and Lenin (in "What is to be Done?", **1902**) came to the defense of the revolutionary path. They opposed Bernstein's reformism and what Lenin dubbed his "economism".

In **1900** Lenin founded the magazine *Iskra* ("Spark").

In **1903** the 2<sup>nd</sup> RSDLP Congress took place in Brussels and London. It resulted in the split between the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, and the Mensheviks, led by Julius Martov. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, control of *Iskra* passed to the Mensheviks (from Issue No. 52) and Lenin thereafter refers to it as "the new *Iskra*".

Following "Bloody Sunday" (January 22<sup>nd</sup> **1905**) a revolution against the autocracy of the Tsar broke out in Russia. One consequence was the institution of a commission to create the "Duma", the limited Russian parliament, which eventually came into existence in **1906**.



Russia 1905

The new situation was considered by the Bolsheviks at the **3<sup>rd</sup> RSDLP Congress in May, 1905**. The Mensheviks were meeting at the same time in a "Conference" in Geneva.

Lenin wrote "Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution" in **June and July of 1905**, immediately after the Congress and the Conference. This book is to the Third Congress as "[One Step Forward, Two Steps Back](#)" is to the Second Congress. But it is also different, because the circumstances are different. In the "Two Tactics" Lenin refers to and continuously compares the Bolsheviks with the Mensheviks, the Congress with the Conference, and the old *Iskra* with the new *Iskra*.

The two tactics (those of the Bolsheviks and those of the Mensheviks) were both supposed to be attempts at responding to the new circumstances. These are the circumstances of bourgeois democracy, just then being set up for the first time in Russia, and the question was: What should the proletarian revolutionaries do? To understand Lenin's true answer, you must pay close attention.

The circumstances are arguably similar in some respects to South Africa at the present time. Joe Slovo refers to the comparison in his 1988 pamphlet on "[The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution](#)". We may say, with Slovo, that ours is not a bourgeois democratic revolution, it is a National Democratic Revolution. But the question is still: What should the partisans of proletarian revolution be doing in such a period? Studying this revolutionary manual of Lenin's can help us to find answers to this question.

In **1914** most of the national constituents of the Second International opted to support their national governments in the terrible inter-Imperialist slaughter known as the **First World War**. The Bolsheviks and some others, notably some comrades in South Africa, refused, and opposed the war totally. Only after that time did the permanent distinction grow up between the class-collaborator "Social-Democrat" parties on the one hand, and the Communist Parties on the other.

Lenin was consistent. The 1905 book "Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution" is already a sustained blast against the vacillating sellout liberals, and in favour of decisive revolution led by the proletariat. He finishes up with the resounding rhetorical question: "Dare We Win?" In the particular circumstances of 1905, this also meant "Dare we remove the Tsar and make a republic?"

What is a "class collaborator"? Is class collaboration the same as "class alliance"? Absolutely not! Class collaboration is a servile abdication whereby the representatives of the working class subordinate themselves to the interests of the ruling (capitalist) class. The working class is very familiar with such collaborators.

Class alliance, on the other hand, is the necessary politics of revolution. The working class must be independent and it must be autonomous, but it must also have allies from outside of its ranks. In South Africa such allies can be peasants and small business people, professionals and intellectuals, but not the principal oppressor, which is monopoly capital. Class alliance serves to prevent the isolation of the working class, and serves to split the forces available to the dominant part of the bourgeoisie. Class alliance, as unity-in-action, can also secure vital material gains and tactical victories for the working class.

From 1905 only twelve years had to pass in Russia before the two-revolution year of 1917. Many documents exist from that period that could be included in a larger “classics” collection. We will select only two, and then use our penultimate part for the revolutionary year, and the final part for the post-revolutionary situation.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, Selection, 1905, Lenin.](#)
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#### The Classics, Part 8a



Rosa Luxemburg

## The Mass Strike

“[The Mass Strike](#)” (a downloadable compilation of it is linked below) is a 1906 [Rosa Luxemburg](#) classic, with a message that is similar to Lenin’s 1902 “[What is to be Done?](#)”

Rosa Luxemburg, in the third paragraph of her Chapter 1, demolishes the anarchist, syndicalist, workerist, “economist” approach to the Mass Strike thus:

*“either the proletariat as a whole are not yet in possession of the powerful organisation and financial resources required, in which case they cannot carry through the general strike; or they are already sufficiently well organised, in which case they do not need the general strike.”*

This does not mean that the Mass Strike, or general strike, is ruled out always and forever as a tactic; but only that the Mass Strike tactic must arise necessarily and organically from the circumstances, as Rosa Luxemburg goes on to explain. In particular, it means that the mass strike as “holy month”, designed to starve the bourgeoisie into submission, is bound to fail.

But then it may come to pass that instead of over-eager anarcho-syndicalists with no subjective or objective basis, the trade unions may be dominated by over-cautious reformists. Rosa Luxemburg records that the German trade union movement was approaching a two million membership, (roughly the same as COSATU in South Africa today), but it was reluctant to move.

Rosa Luxemburg describes the 1906 problematic of Germany thus:

*“The German labour movement... assumes the peculiar form of a double pyramid whose base and body consist of one solid mass but whose apexes are wide apart... To desire the unity of these through the union of the party executive and the general commission is to desire to build a bridge at the very spot where the distance is greater and the crossing more difficult. Not above, amongst the heads of the leading directing organisations and in their federative alliance, but below, amongst the organised proletarian masses, lies the guarantee of the real unity of the labour movement.”* [last page of “The Mass Strike” compilation, linked below].

This argument supports the SACP tactic of developing Voting District Branches, so that the “*real unity*” of the South African National Democratic Revolutionary Alliance can be structurally put into effect “*below*” – at local level – between the local structures of its constituent parts: ANC, SACP, COSATU and SANCO.

The relationship of the party and the class, or in Luxemburg’s particular terms “*the social democracy*” and “*the trade-unions*”, opens up in Chapter 6 of The Mass Strike to a vision of a revolutionary *ensemble* that must necessarily go far beyond the structures of its previously-organised components, which are bound to be a minority of the whole. Luxemburg writes:

*“The plan of undertaking mass strikes as a serious political class action with organised workers only is absolutely hopeless. If the mass strike, or rather,*

*mass strikes, and the mass struggle are to be successful they must become a real people's movement, that is, the widest sections of the proletariat must be drawn into the fight... Here **the organisation does not supply the troops of the struggle, but the struggle, in an ever growing degree, supplies recruits for the organisation.***

*"... it is not permissible to visualise the class movement of the proletariat as a movement of the organised minority.*

*"...the sections which are today unorganised and backward will, in the struggle, prove themselves the most radical, the most impetuous element, and not one that will have to be dragged along...*

***"If we now leave the pedantic scheme of demonstrative mass strikes artificially brought about by order of parties and trade unions, and turn to the living picture of a peoples' movement arising with elementary energy, from the culmination of class antagonisms and the political situation—a movement which passes, politically as well as economically, into mass struggles and mass strikes—it becomes obvious that the task of social democracy does not consist in the technical preparation and direction of mass strikes, but, first and foremost, in the political leadership of the whole movement."***

Luxemburg is saying that the political structure must lead. The trade union movement cannot lead the revolution. Please read Chapter 6 of The Mass Strike, linked below, and especially the concluding words.

Try [this link](#) if you wish to access a linked list of further works by Rosa Luxemburg, on [MIA](#).

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Mass Strike, 1906, Rosa Luxemburg](#).
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1890s cartoon of Cecil Rhodes

## Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism

Lenin's "[Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism](#)" (a file of the final chapter is attached, and is also downloadable via the link below) takes its rightful place here as one of the classics of the Marxist canon.

Lenin's classic works of the early years of the RSDLP ([What is to be Done?](#), [One Step Forward, Two Steps Back](#), and [Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution](#)) established the revolutionary posture and methods of that party, in the face of the Menshevik, "economist", reformist opposition within its ranks.

Marxists Internet Archive has a page of links to [Selected Works of Lenin](#), which contains a number of other candidates for any collection of classics. There is also Lenin's 1909 book on philosophy, called "[Materialism and Empirio-Criticism](#)". But for this brief course of "Classics", because space and time constrain us, we will leave most of these titles aside. The total number of documents authored by Lenin and available on the Marxists Internet Archive is 4170. They are listed and hyperlinked [by date](#), and [alphabetically](#).

After a few years of attenuated bourgeois democracy, what confronted the RSDLP in 1914 was an international intra-Imperialist struggle that suddenly metastasized into the most terrible war that the world had ever seen. The split that it caused in the Second International was more than a problem. It was a catastrophe for the working-class movement. But even more than that, the phenomenon called Imperialism was a problem for the world that has not yet, in 2014, gone away.

Lenin was constantly studying. From 1896 to 1899 he studied prodigiously to produce the large work called "[The Development of Capitalism in Russia](#)". In the first decade of the new century he began to study philosophy intensively. Then he began to study Imperialism.

In those days the term "Imperialism" was not impossible for any bourgeois to utter, as is often the case today. The term was common in daily journalism. It was an English liberal, J A Hobson, who wrote the first attemptedly definitive book on the subject, published in 1902 as "[Imperialism, a study](#)". This was immediately after the Anglo-Boer War had come to an end.

It was this [Anglo-Boer War](#) that most clearly defined modern Imperialism in its beginning, as a world system, distinct from plain colonialism. Here was a metropolitan power (Britain) demanding profits without taking responsibilities, and securing its demand by force of arms. Lenin deliberately used Hobson's work, and that of other bourgeois writers, as he frankly admits:

*"To enable the reader to obtain the most well-grounded idea of imperialism, I deliberately tried to quote as extensively as possible bourgeois economists who have to admit the particularly incontrovertible facts concerning the latest stage of capitalist economy."*

In Chapter 7 of "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism" Lenin "sums up", in a highly compressed way, what capitalist Imperialism actually is. In the first paragraph, among other things, he says:



*“...the monopolies, which have grown out of free competition, do not eliminate the latter, but exist above it and alongside it, and thereby give rise to a number of very acute, intense antagonisms, frictions and conflicts.”*

Thus, Imperialism is a system dominated by monopoly.

A little later on Lenin writes: “... politically, imperialism is, in general, a striving towards violence and reaction.”

South Africa has seen Imperialism in all its aspects, but especially in war. It was the [Anglo-Boer War](#) of 1899-1902 that announced Imperialism's intentions to the world, as much as the [Spanish-American War](#) of 1898 did, or the defeat of the [Khalifa Abdallahi](#)'s forces at [Omdurman](#) in Sudan by the British under Kitchener in the same year.



**Theodore Roosevelt (US President 1901-1909) and the “Great White Fleet”**

The system of state-monopoly capital, and the dominance of the mineral-energy complex over the South African productive economy, dates from that time. This system has never been fundamentally changed, and it has never brought full employment. It has failed, but to change it will require a new confrontation with Imperialism.

Imperialism is a system of war. Lenin pours scorn on *“Kautsky's silly little fable about "peaceful" ultra-imperialism,”* calling it *“the reactionary attempt of a frightened philistine to hide from stern reality.”*

Lenin concludes:

*“The question is: what means other than war could there be under capitalism to overcome the disparity between the development of productive forces and the accumulation of capital on the one side, and the division of colonies and spheres of influence for finance capital on the other?”*

The age of Imperialism, for more than 115 years, has been an age of war, just as Lenin predicted it would be. From Lenin's work to that of William Blum's [“Killing Hope”](#), it is clear that Imperialism is an aggressive force which at some stage will have to be confronted and defeated. One cannot hope to be exempt from this confrontation forever. In Africa, Imperialism itself is forcing the confrontation at an increasing speed.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Chapter 7, 1916, Lenin.](#)**
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Lenin arrives at the Finland Station in April, 1917

## The April Theses

The [April Theses](#) is a classic document, not because it is polished (it is rough), but because of its impact at a moment of history. It was given by Lenin verbally. The written version (download linked below) was prepared very shortly afterwards.

Lenin arrived in Petrograd (later Leningrad; now St Petersburg) barely a month after the February, 1917 revolution which had overthrown the Tsar. A bourgeois republican government was installed that had the intention of continuing the disastrous intra-Imperialist war in which Russia was involved against Germany and other countries. This is the war known to bourgeois historians as the First World War, the one that started in 1914 and ended in 1918. South Africa was also involved in it.

It was among those few individuals and small organisations who opposed the Imperialist war in South Africa that the need for our communist party was first seriously raised. The Communist Party of South Africa was formed by admission to

the Communist International in 1921 – the same Communist International that Lenin called for in the April Theses in 1917. **Thesis 10** demands “A new International.”

*“We must take the initiative in creating a revolutionary International, an International against the social-chauvinists and against the ‘Centre’,” it says.*

The Third International (also called Communist International or Comintern) was duly established in 1919.

The “social-chauvinists” of different countries (e.g. Germany, Britain, France and Italy as well as Russia) had in 1914 supported the Imperialist war against each other, thus betraying the Second International. But the Russian Bolsheviks and the German Spartacists had opposed the war, and had supported proletarian internationalism.

The term “revolutionary defensism” was a code for the further continuation of the Russian war policy, which Lenin clearly opposes in **Thesis 1**.

The “April Theses” are short and so do not require a long introduction. But one can usefully highlight the following:

**Thesis 2** says *“The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution — which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie — ...*

*“This peculiar situation demands of us an ability to adapt ourselves to the special conditions of Party work among unprecedentedly large masses of proletarians who have just awakened to political life.”*

There are echoes of this situation in South Africa today.

**Thesis 4** says *“As long as we are in the minority we carry on the work of criticising and exposing errors and at the same time we preach the necessity of transferring the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, so that the people may overcome their mistakes by experience.”*

This led to the slogan “**All Power to the Soviets**”, and **Thesis 5** then says *“to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step.”*

**Thesis 8** says: *“It is not our immediate task to “introduce” socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the control of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies.”*

In other words, the bourgeois dictatorship was to be replaced at once by a dictatorship over the bourgeoisie.

**Thesis 9** proposes to change the Party’s name from “Social Democrat” (RSDLP) to “Communist Party.”

So much of this did come to pass, as we know, that it is difficult to imagine that Lenin’s support for these demands at the time, among the leadership and even among the strictly Bolshevik leadership, was small.

But what we have noted before, and which was manifest at the Second and Third Congresses of the RSDLP, applied again. Lenin knew how the base of the Party was constructed and how it was reproducing itself. Hence he was able to be bold. He knew that the cadre force of the Bolsheviks as a whole, and potentially the entire working masses of Russia, were behind his proposals, or soon would be. And so it came to pass.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The April Theses, 1917, Lenin](#).

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#### The Classics, Part 9a



Lenin underground, disguised, mid-1917



# The State and Revolution

Lenin's "[The State and Revolution](#)" is a classic of classics. Not only is it an original work in itself, but it also revisits a string of other major Marxist classics. We will take Chapters [Two](#) and [Three](#) of this, Lenin's most extraordinary work, as our main text (attached; download linked below).

"The State and Revolution" was written after April, and before October, 1917, between two revolutions and in a time of furious class struggle, during which Lenin was in hiding for part of the time. The book certainly shows what was on Lenin's mind in between the two Russian revolutions of 1917.

In the first line of Chapter 2 of "The State and Revolution" Lenin describes "[The Poverty of Philosophy](#)", written in 1847 when Marx was still in his twenties, as "the first mature works of Marxism," - or in other words, as a classic.

Lenin moves on to the classic [Communist Manifesto](#), where he immediately derives the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" from the equally direct words of Marx and Engels in the Manifesto, namely: *"the state, i.e. the proletariat organised as the ruling class"*.

*"The state is a special organization of force: it is an organization of violence for the suppression of some class."* In other words, the proletariat will use its state to suppress the bourgeois class.

Lenin then turns on the reformists. In the first paragraph of the third part of Chapter 3, Lenin calls the anarchists and the petty-bourgeois opportunists "twin brothers" (*"anarcho-syndicalism... is merely the twin brother of opportunism"*). At this point in Chapter 2 he writes:

*"The petty-bourgeois democrats, those sham socialists who replaced the class struggle by dreams of class harmony, even pictured the socialist transformation in a dreamy fashion — not as the overthrow of the rule of the exploiting class, but as the peaceful submission of the minority to the majority which has become aware of its aims. This petty-bourgeois utopia, which is inseparable from the idea of the state being above classes, led in practice to the betrayal of the interests of the working classes."*

Chapter 2 proceeds to touch "[The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte](#)". It returns to Marx on the dictatorship of the proletariat, this time in those very words, in a letter written in 1852; and Lenin says: **"Only he is a Marxist who extends the**

***recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat."***

Marx's classic work "[The Civil War in France](#)" was written during, and immediately after, the events of early 1871 in Paris. Lenin's summary of Marx, as usual, is brief. It misses very little and cannot easily be beaten. We will note its highlights here.

The first is where Lenin writes that Marx would have made a correction to the [Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848 on the basis of the experience of the Paris Commune. In 1871 Marx wrote: *"...the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes"* - by which he meant that proletariat had to *"to smash the bureaucratic-military machine"* and to replace it with a state that is *"the proletariat organized as the ruling class"* and as an *"armed people"* that had disbanded the bourgeoisie's *"special bodies of armed men"*.



October 1917

Lenin wrote:

*"Marx did not indulge in utopias; he expected the experience of the mass movement to provide the reply to the question as to the specific forms this organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class would assume and as to the exact manner in which this organisation would be combined with the most complete, most consistent 'winning of the battle of democracy.'"*

The Commune was *“a practical step that was more important than hundreds of programmes and arguments.”* Lenin proceeds in the second and third sections of this chapter to relate how the practical steps were executed.

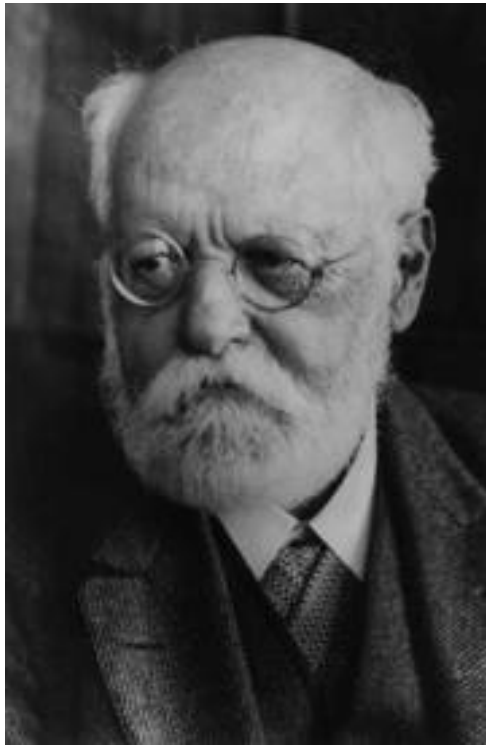
In the fourth part, Lenin addresses the question of centralism, and clearly shows that centralism is not imposed but must be won politically, as a matter of free-willing action. All the time, Lenin is carrying on a secondary argument against the “opportunists” and the “anarchists”, whom, as we noted, he says are “twin brothers.” Lenin writes:

*“The anarchists dismissed the question of political forms altogether. The opportunists of present-day Social-Democracy accepted the bourgeois political forms of the parliamentary democratic state as the limit which should not be overstepped; they battered their foreheads praying before this 'model', and denounced as anarchism every desire to break these forms.”*

*“...now one has to engage in excavations, as it were, in order to bring undistorted Marxism to the knowledge of the mass of the people,”* says Lenin.

As it was in 1917, so it remains in 2015. One has to engage in excavations.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The State and Revolution, Chapters 2 and 3, 1917, Lenin.](#)**
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Karl “Renegade” Kautsky, 1854-1938

## The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky

**Note on the October Revolution:** Our review of the Marxist classics includes original material from before and after the proletarian Russian Revolution of October 1917, but no account of the revolution itself.

One famous eye-witness account is that of **John Reed**, called “[Ten Days that Shook the World](#)”, first published in 1919.

**Lenin’s Introduction** to Reed’s book says:

*“With the greatest interest and with never slackening attention I read John Reed’s book, Ten Days that Shook the World. Unreservedly do I recommend it to the workers of the world. Here is a book which I should like to see published in millions of copies and translated into all languages. It gives a truthful and most vivid exposition of the events so significant to the comprehension of what really is the Proletarian Revolution and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. These problems are widely discussed, but before one can accept or reject these ideas, he must understand the full significance of his decision.*

*John Reed's book will undoubtedly help to clear this question, which is the fundamental problem of the international labor movement."*

Another famous [History of the Russian Revolution](#) was written in 1918 by **Leon Trotsky**. Here is an extract from Trotsky's account relating to May and June of 1917, in between revolutions:

*"Almost all the articles, without exception, in all the official and semi-official organs were directed against the Bolsheviks. There was scarcely a charge, scarcely a calumny, that was not levelled against us in that period. Of course, the leading role in this campaign was played by the Cadet bourgeoisie, whose class instinct led it to recognize that the question at issue was not merely the offensive, but the entire further course of the Revolution and, in the first place, the form of Government authority. The whole bourgeois machinery for manufacturing 'public opinion' was put into motion at full steam. All the Government offices and institutions, publications, public platforms, and university chairs were drawn into the service of this one general aim: of making the Bolsheviks impossible as a political party. In this concentrated effort and in this dramatic newspaper campaign against the Bolsheviks were already contained the first germs of the civil war which was bound to accompany the next phase of the Revolution. The sole aim of all this incitement and slander was to create an impenetrable wall of estrangement and enmity between the labouring masses on the one hand and 'educated society' on the other.*

*"The Liberal bourgeoisie understood that it could not win the support of the masses without the help of the lower middle-class democrats, who, as we pointed out above, had temporarily become the leaders of the revolutionary organizations. Consequently, the immediate aim of the political incitements against the Bolsheviks was to bring about an irreconcilable feeling of enmity between our party and the wide ranks of the Socialist intellectuals, who, having broken away from the proletariat, could not but fall into political bondage to the Liberal bourgeoisie."*

### **The Renegade Kautsky**

In 1881, two years before Karl Marx's death, **Karl Kautsky**, a young intellectual from Germany, went to visit Marx and Frederick Engels in London. Kautsky subsequently acquired a reputation as the "Pope" of communism. Lenin called him *"the ideological leader of the Second International."* Kautsky became the principal leader of the German Social Democrats at a time when the German party was far larger and more highly-developed than any other socialist party in the world.



Lenin had difficulties with the German Social-Democrats in the early 1900s, as we have already seen in this course. Among these German Social-Democrats, the person who was bold enough to challenge Lenin openly was Rosa Luxemburg, and Lenin answered her directly. They remained comrades. Lenin later quoted Rosa in “The April Theses” (1917), in a very critical moment. Rosa and the Spartacists, like Lenin and the Bolsheviks, had by then opposed the Imperialist war without any hesitation.

Kautsky had been less prominent during the earlier controversies but by 1914 he was one of those mainly responsible for the open betrayal of anti-Imperialist working-class internationalism. This was when the German Social-Democrats, under Kautsky’s leadership, backed their bourgeois-Imperialist government in its catastrophic war against England and France, whose equally craven Social-Democrats, in turn, also backed their bourgeois-Imperialist governments. Lenin called this kind of betrayal “Social-Imperialism”.

[“The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky”](#) (see the compilation of Chapters 1, 2 and 3 attached, and linked below) is a response to a 1918 pamphlet written by Kautsky called [“The Dictatorship of the Proletariat”](#), which was an attack on the Russian Bolsheviks, as well as a betrayal of Marx.

In Chapter 1 of “The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky”, Lenin takes Kautsky’s general argument, deals with it, and then makes the following definitions:

*“Dictatorship is rule based directly upon force and unrestricted by any laws.*

*“The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is rule won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by any laws.”*

In other words, the Revolution does not ask permission, and it does not apologise. The Revolution breaks the old rules, and it makes new, revolutionary rules. This is the part of revolution that the bourgeoisie particularly dislikes, as we can see in South Africa, today. In Chapter 2, Lenin notes:

*“Kautsky takes from Marxism what is acceptable to the liberals, to the bourgeoisie (the criticism of the Middle Ages, and the progressive historical role of capitalism in general and of capitalist democracy in particular), and discards, passes over in silence, glosses over all that in Marxism which is unacceptable to the bourgeoisie (the revolutionary violence of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie for the latter’s destruction). That is why Kautsky, by*

*virtue of his objective position and irrespective of what his subjective convictions may be, inevitably proves to be a lackey of the bourgeoisie.”*

We still have many such “Marxists”, of the Kautsky kind, even in South Africa.

In Chapter 3, Lenin sharpens the point as follows:

*“If the exploiters are defeated in one country only—and this, of course, is typical, since a simultaneous revolution in a number of countries is a rare exception—they still remain stronger than the exploited, for the international connections of the exploiters are enormous. That a section of the exploited from the least advanced middle-peasant, artisan and similar groups of the population may, and indeed does, follow the exploiters has been proved by all revolutions, including the Commune (for there were also proletarians among the Versailles troops, which the most learned Kautsky has “forgotten”).*

*“In these circumstances, to assume that in a revolution which is at all profound and serious the issue is decided simply by the relation between the majority and the minority is the acme of stupidity, the silliest prejudice of a common liberal, an attempt to deceive the people by concealing from them a well-established historical truth. This historical truth is that in every profound revolution, the prolonged, stubborn and desperate resistance of the exploiters, who for a number of years retain important practical advantages over the exploited, is the rule. Never—except in the sentimental fantasies of the sentimental fool Kautsky—will the exploiters submit to the decision of the exploited majority without trying to make use of their advantages in a last desperate battle, or series of battles.*

***“The transition from capitalism to communism takes an entire historical epoch. Until this epoch is over, the exploiters inevitably cherish the hope of restoration, and this hope turns into attempts at restoration.”***

Not even Lenin’s Great October Soviet Socialist Revolution was automatically permanent.

This classic work is easy to read and is full of lessons that are applicable today.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, 1918, Lenin.](#)



Bukharin and Trotsky

## Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder

Lenin's "[Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder](#)" (compilation attached; download linked below) is a classic book that was written as advice to the proletarian parties in bourgeois-democratic countries.

It is not the same as Lenin's 1918 "['Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality](#)", which was a correction to the "Left Communists" among the Russian revolutionaries themselves. These included Bukharin, the "doctrinairist", who by 1920 had published, with Preobrazhensky, the pedantic "[ABC of Communism](#)". Lenin was meanwhile taking an opposite tack, and opposing "Left Wing Communism" with the classic book we are looking at today, also published in 1920.

Our downloadable selection includes the chapters listed here in bold. All of these chapter-headings are hyperlinked to the Marxists Internet Archive, where you can read the entire book.

### Contents:

1. [\*\*In What Sense We Can Speak of the International Significance of the Russian Revolution\*\*](#)
2. [\*\*An Essential Condition of the Bolsheviks' Success\*\*](#)
3. [\*The Principal Stages in the History of Bolshevism\*](#)
4. [\*The Struggle Against Which Enemies Within the Working-Class Movement Helped Bolshevism Develop, Gain Strength, and Become Steeled\*](#)
5. [\*"Left-Wing" Communism in Germany. the Leaders, the Party, the Class, the Masses\*](#)
6. [\*Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions?\*](#)
7. [\*\*Should We Participate in Bourgeois Parliaments?\*\*](#)
8. [\*No Compromises?\*](#)
9. [\*"Left-Wing" Communism in Great Britain\*](#)

## 10. [Several Conclusions](#)

## 11. [Appendix](#)

In his **Conclusion**, Lenin begins with two very confident paragraphs summing up the work that he had been intimately involved in as a vanguard cadre:

*“The Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905 revealed a highly original turn in world history: in one of the most backward capitalist countries, the strike movement attained a scope and power unprecedented anywhere in the world. In the first month of 1905 alone, the number of strikers was ten times the annual average for the previous decade (1895-1904); from January to October 1905, strikes grew all the time and reached enormous proportions. Under the influence of a number of unique historical conditions, backward Russia was the first to show the world, not only the growth, by leaps and bounds, of the independent activity of the oppressed masses in time of revolution (this had occurred in all great revolutions), but also that the significance of the proletariat is infinitely greater than its proportion in the total population; it showed a combination of the economic strike and the political strike, with the latter developing into an armed uprising, and the birth of the Soviets, a new form of mass struggle and mass organisation of the classes oppressed by capitalism.*

*“The revolutions of February and October 1917 led to the all-round development of the Soviets on a nation-wide scale and to their victory in the proletarian socialist revolution. In less than two years, the international character of the Soviets, the spread of this form of struggle and organisation to the world working-class movement and the historical mission of the Soviets as the grave-digger, heir and successor of bourgeois parliamentarianism and of bourgeois democracy in general, all became clear.”*

In **Chapter 2**, Lenin stresses the necessity of having a disciplined vanguard part, and says:

*“As a current of political thought and as a political party, Bolshevism has existed since 1903. Only the history of Bolshevism during the entire period of its existence can satisfactorily explain why it has been able to build up and maintain, under most difficult conditions, the iron discipline needed for the victory of the proletariat.”*

In chapters 3 and 4, which are not in our compilation, but which can be read on the Internet, Lenin covers some of the experiences and the controversies that formed the Bolshevik party on a “granite foundation of theory”. We have covered some of this ground in our examination of previous Classics.

In the body of the book, Lenin definitely advises the Communists to work within, and not to boycott, both reactionary trade unions, and Parliaments. Lenin seems to be saying that it is the “granite foundation of theory” that gives the vanguard party the certainty and the confidence that enables it “*with the maximum rapidity, to supplement one form with another, to substitute one for another, and to adapt our tactics,*” or in other words, to be able to manoeuvre. And without the ability to manoeuvre, there can be no thought of victory. All “*doctrinairism*” that inhibits the ability to manoeuvre, is dangerous.

Lenin’s final two paragraphs of the book are as follows:

*“The Communists must exert every effort to direct the working-class movement and social development in general along the straightest and shortest road to the victory of Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world-wide scale. That is an incontestable truth. **But it is enough to take one little step farther**—a step that might seem to be in the same direction—**and truth turns into error.** We have only to say, as the German and British Left Communists do, that we recognise only one road, only the direct road, and that we will not permit tacking, conciliatory manoeuvres, or compromising—and it will be a mistake which may cause, and in part has already caused and is causing, very grave prejudices to communism. Right doctrinairism persisted in recognising only the old forms, and became utterly bankrupt, for it did not notice the new content. Left doctrinairism persists in the unconditional repudiation of certain old forms, failing to see that the new content is forcing its way through all and sundry forms, that it is our duty as Communists to master all forms to learn how, with the maximum rapidity, to supplement one form with another, to substitute one for another, and to adapt our tactics to any such change that does not come from our class or from our efforts.*

*“World revolution has been so powerfully stimulated and accelerated by the horrors, vileness and abominations of the world imperialist war and by the hopelessness of the situation created by it, this revolution is developing in scope and depth with such splendid rapidity, with such a wonderful variety of changing forms, with such an instructive practical refutation of all doctrinairism, that there is every reason to hope for a rapid and complete recovery of the international communist movement from the infantile disorder of “Left-wing” communism.”*

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder \(Redaction\), 1920, Lenin.](#)





Hammer and Sickle = Worker-Peasant Alliance

## Report on the National and Colonial Question

V I Lenin wrote constantly. Writing and publishing his writing in newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and books was Lenin's main means of communication with the enormous movement that he led. Lenin was a very good and skilled writer, was the leading theoretician of his time, and was critically involved in world-shaping events. Marxists Internet Archive (MIA) contains 4170 "of a potential 4500" Lenin-authored documents, listed [by date](#), and alphabetically [by title](#). MIA also has the Progress Publishers, Moscow 1963-64 "[Lenin Selected Works](#)" selection. Which of Lenin's works should be included among our choice of classics? We have taken a view, and have included a number of them. Feedback is welcome, if you agree, or if you disagree.

Today we choose the crucial document that launched **National Democratic Revolution** (NDR) as the defining strategy and tactics of the struggle against Imperialism. Lenin gave the report-back of the Commission on the National and Colonial Question to the Second Congress of the Communist International (often abbreviated as "2CCI") on 26 July, 1920. This is the document that is attached, and downloadable via the first link below.

### Origin of South Africa's National Democratic Revolution

The following year, at the third Comintern Congress ("3CCI"), the Communist Party of South Africa was admitted and thereby originally constituted, not on its own

terms but on the Comintern's terms, which since the previous year had included the NDR policy. This is the true origin of South Africa's National Democratic Revolution of today.

Practical politics is always a matter of alliance, and in different circumstances, different alliances are called for. Communists commonly regard an alliance between workers and peasants as normal (hence the hammer-and-sickle logo, which was adopted as "official" by the communists in the same period). Proletarian parties have also, in the past, attempted class alliances with the bourgeoisie against feudalism, or against colonialism.

Tactical alliances - unity-in-action - are normal and necessary, in order to isolate and thereby to defeat an adversary, and equally to avoid being isolated and defeated by the adversary. Therefore the question of the appropriate alliances in the anti-colonial and anti-Imperialist struggle was bound to arise.

In his report to the 2CCI on the National & Colonial Question, Lenin says:

*"We have discussed whether it would be right or wrong, in principle and in theory, to state that the Communist International and the Communist parties must support the bourgeois-democratic movement in backward countries. As a result of our discussion, we have arrived at the unanimous decision to speak of the **national-revolutionary movement** rather than of the 'bourgeois-democratic' movement. **It is beyond doubt that any national movement can only be a bourgeois-democratic movement**, since the overwhelming mass of the population in the backward countries consist of **peasants who represent bourgeois-capitalist relationships**... However, the objections have been raised that, if we speak of the bourgeois-democratic movement, we shall be obliterating all distinctions between the reformist and the revolutionary movements. Yet that distinction has been very clearly revealed of late in the backward and colonial countries..."*

Here are all the makings of the NDR, including the name, even if the words are not quite in their present-day order. Lenin calls it "national-revolutionary", but he makes it absolutely clear that he is talking of a democratic class alliance with anti-colonial, anti-Imperialist elements of the national bourgeoisie in colonial countries.

The 2CCI was followed within two months by the famous "Congress of the Peoples of the East", in Baku, in the southern part of what was soon to become the Soviet Union. This was the first international anti-colonial conference, and what followed it during the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was the defeat of direct colonial rule throughout the entire globe, based on the tactics laid down in Lenin's report.

Therefore Lenin's report on the National and Colonial Question is treated here as an undoubted classic.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Report on National and Colonial Question, 2CCI, 1920, Lenin.](#)
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Role of Workers under the NEP – contemporary poster

## The Role and Function of TUs under the NEP

*“The proletarian state may, without changing its own nature, permit freedom to trade and the development of capitalism only within certain bounds, and only on the condition that the state regulates (supervises, controls, determines the forms and methods of, etc.) private trade and private capitalism. The success of such regulation will depend not only on the state authorities but also, and to a larger extent, on the degree of maturity of the proletariat and of the masses of the working people generally, on their cultural level, etc. But even if this regulation is completely successful, the antagonism of class interests between labour and capital will certainly remain. Consequently, one of the main tasks that will henceforth confront the trade unions is to protect in every way the class interests of the proletariat in its struggle against capital. This task should be openly put in the forefront, and the machinery of the trade unions must be reorganised, changed or*

*supplemented accordingly (conflict commissions, strike funds, mutual aid funds, etc., should be formed, or rather, built up)."*

Today's text on the "[Role and Function of Trade Unions under the NEP](#)" (1922) speaks unequivocally of *"the duty of the trade unions to protect the interests of the working people"*, in both private and public enterprises. (Text attached, or downloadable via the link below).

This will be our last classic of Lenin's. It is one of several classic documents of his that address the circumstances of the NEP - the New Economic Policy - which was in place in the Soviet Union in the last years of his life and for some years after his death. Others include "[The Tax in Kind](#)" (1921), "[The Speech at the Plenary Session of the Moscow Soviet](#)" (1922) and "[On Co-operation](#)" (1923).

Lenin was ill from the start of the NEP, and progressively more ill, finally bedridden and unable to speak for months until his death in January, 1924. The Civil War was also continuing until 1922. Later, the richer, capitalising peasants or "kulaks" became demonised, correctly or not, and the NEP came to an end around 1928. In Lenin's view, the NEP was the correct transitional arrangement. Large-scale industry was mostly in state hands, but small businesses were privately owned.

Here in South Africa we do not yet have proletarian state power in the way that the Russian workers obviously had it at the time of Lenin's writing of this text, 1922. But in other respects we have a similar set of circumstances. Big-scale industry, whether in the hands of monopoly capital or of the state, only employs a portion of those available for work, leaving a very large portion of the population having to fend for itself, as survivalists, entrepreneurs, SMMEs and all the rest of it.

Above all in South Africa, just as under the NEP in Russia in the 1920s, the class struggle continues. Lenin is very frank about this. In the end there is not going to be a win-win situation, and there is no win-win along the way, either, but only class struggle with both winners and losers. Here is an example of what Lenin had to say on this score:

*"As long as classes exist, the class struggle is inevitable. In the period of transition from capitalism to socialism the existence of classes is inevitable; and the Programme of the Russian Communist Party definitely states that we are taking only the first steps in the transition from capitalism to socialism. Hence, the Communist Party, the Soviet government and the trade unions must frankly admit the existence of an economic struggle and its inevitability until the electrification of industry and agriculture is completed—at least in the main—and until small production and the supremacy of the market are thereby cut off at the roots."*



Trade unions are all about “*contact with the masses*” and therefore cannot be sectarian:

*“Under no circumstances must trade union members be required to subscribe to any specific political views; in this respect, as well as in respect of religion, the trade unions must be non-partisan.”*

The interest of the working class is “developmental” in a material sense, namely in an “*enormous increase in the productive forces*”. Lenin puts it like this:

*“Following its seizure of political power, the principal and fundamental interest of the proletariat lies in securing an enormous increase in the productive forces of society and in the output of manufactured goods.”*

Lenin concludes:

*“The Communist Party, the Soviet bodies that conduct cultural and educational activities and all Communist members of trade unions must therefore devote far more attention to the ideological struggle against petty-bourgeois influences, trends and deviations among the trade unions, especially because the New Economic Policy is bound to lead to a certain strengthening of capitalism. It is urgently necessary to counteract this by intensifying the struggle against petty-bourgeois influences upon the working class.”*

A NEP-like situation, which South Africa now has, and arguably more so with the New Growth Path, involves a deliberate transitional expansion of the petty-bourgeoisie, and therefore also requires a constant struggle to maintain a superstructure over this petty-bourgeoisie. Such is the lesson of Lenin in this case.

The formation and the growth of the proletariat will in due course become determinant, because class struggle is the motor of history, and because the proletariat is the gravedigger of capitalism. In the mean time, the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie must continue with their historical role of creating employment and thereby creating an ever-bigger and finally overwhelmingly massive and politicised proletariat.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Role and Functions of the TUs under the NEP, 1921, Lenin.](#)



[Antonio Gramsci, 1891-1937](#)

## Some Aspects of the Southern Question

It is a mistake to treat Antonio Gramsci's contribution to political thought as substantially separated in time, or in content, from that of Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and the other revolutionary internationalists who were Gramsci's classic contemporaries.

Gramsci was in Moscow in 1922 and 1923 and met and married his wife there. As a representative of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), he was familiar with the workings of the Comintern. Lenin died in 1924. Gramsci was imprisoned by the Italian fascists in November, 1926, and was not released until just before his death, eleven years later, in 1937.

The great revival in his reputation came with the publishing of Gramsci's "Prison Diaries" not long after the 1945 defeat of fascism in Europe. But the problem with these diaries is that they are voluminous, and were not edited by the author for publication. Hence there have been disputes and rival claims as to what Gramsci stood for, and about what his precise contribution to classical political theory was.

There is a [Gramsci Archive here](#), on MIA.

The 1926 document “[Some Aspects of the Southern Question](#)” (download linked below) is the last that Gramsci wrote before his incarceration. Although on the face of it unfinished, yet it is certainly a classic, and it has great relevance to the National Democratic Revolution, whether in South Africa or elsewhere. In the beginning of its third paragraph, Gramsci says:

*“The Northern bourgeoisie has subjugated the South of Italy and the Islands, and reduced them to exploitable colonies...”*

Northern Italy, where there are many great cities including Turin, home of the giant Fiat company, was as “developed” as France, Germany and England were in the first quarter of the twentieth century. But south of Rome, and on the large Italian islands of Sardinia and Sicily, the people lived very differently. In many ways the situation in Italy resembled the “Colonialism of a Special Type” that was maturing in South Africa in the same period, and which lasted until the South African democratic breakthrough of the 1990s. Colonised and colonisers were simultaneously present in the same territory.

The Italian Southerners were even subjected to racial contempt, such that, as Gramsci records:

*“It is well known what kind of ideology has been disseminated in myriad ways among the masses in the North, by the propagandists of the bourgeoisie: the South is the ball and chain which prevents the social development of Italy from progressing more rapidly; the Southerners are biologically inferior beings, semi-barbarians or total barbarians, by natural destiny...”* and so on.

As a communist, Gramsci advocated “*the political alliance between Northern workers and Southern peasants, to oust the bourgeoisie from State power.*” But he follows this bare formulation with many fascinating incidences and details about the class structure and class dynamics of Italy at the time and during the preceding three decades, which included the First World War and the subsequent rise of Mussolini’s fascists. Gramsci accompanies these narratives with an exceptional sensitivity towards the role of intellectuals, whom he comes close to treating as a distinct class.

Gramsci writes:

*“Intellectuals develop slowly, far more slowly than any other social group, by their very nature and historical function. **They represent the entire cultural tradition of a people, seeking to resume and synthesize all of its history.** This can be said especially of the old type of intellectual: the intellectual born on*

*the peasant terrain. To think it possible that such intellectuals, en masse, can break with the entire past and situate themselves totally upon the terrain of a new ideology, is absurd. It is absurd for the mass of intellectuals, and perhaps it is also absurd for very many intellectuals taken individually as well - notwithstanding all the honourable efforts which they make and want to make."*

Yet Gramsci regards such an intellectual break as crucial, saying:

*"This is gigantic and difficult, but precisely worthy of every sacrifice on the part of those intellectuals - from North and South - who have understood that only two social forces are essentially national and bearers of the future: the proletariat and the peasants."*

It is fitting that the last of the classics in our ten-part series on "The Classics" includes such words as these from Gramsci, reminding us that for as much as the "classics" provide us with a foundation, yet there is "gigantic and difficult" intellectual work still ahead, so that we should never treat our classics as dogma, and their authors as eternal authorities. To do so would be to betray them.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Some Aspects of the Southern Question, 1926, Gramsci](#).
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**Course: The Classics**

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